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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 001165

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PTERR](#) [KDEM](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: HOME AFFAIRS MINISTER EXPRESSES DISMAY WITH
POLITICAL SITUATION

REF: DHAKA 1158

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶11. (C) Home Affairs Adviser Gen. M.A. Matin in a meeting with the Ambassador on November 6 expressed dismay with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) for making continuous new demands for participating in Parliamentary elections scheduled for next month. They discussed strategies for enticing the BNP to take part in the campaign. The Ambassador also asked Matin and Home Affairs Secretary Mohammad Abdul Karim to push forward Embassy proposals for sports diplomacy events to support community policing and for an anti-violence and improvised explosive device (IED) awareness campaign. Matin and Karim raised concerns about the awareness campaign, but signaled it could go ahead if supported by the elite law enforcement Rapid Action Battalion and the military's Directorate General Forces Intelligence.

MATIN EXPRESSES FRUSTRATION WITH THE BNP

¶12. (C) The meeting between the Ambassador and Home Affairs Adviser Matin came the day of Awami League President Sheikh Hasina's triumphal return to Bangladesh after more than four months abroad on medical parole. (Note: Sheikh Hasina and her arch-foe, Bangladesh Nationalist Party Chairwoman Khaleda Zia, both face multiple charges of graft. Both are out of jail, however, and appear eligible to run in the Parliamentary elections set for December 18 by the Caretaker Government. End note.) Matin estimated nearly 300,000 people had come out to cheer her return.

¶13. (C) Despite the hullabaloo over Hasina's return, Matin appeared preoccupied by the BNP's recent negotiations with his colleagues in the Caretaker Government. He said Zia was continuously making new demands and changing agreements previously made. For example, Zia was insisting the Government allow BNP members who were convicted of graft to run in the Parliamentary elections on December 18. Matin asked the Ambassador what the Government should do if the BNP decided to boycott the elections. The Ambassador urged the Government to do everything in its power to persuade Zia to compete in the election. He suggested, for example, that the government give the parties a few extra days to register their candidates in accordance with BNP demands. (Note: The Government on November 9 extended the deadline for filing candidate nominations from November 13 to November 20. End note.) The Ambassador and Matin also discussed offering the

BNP some power in the Parliament should the Awami League win, perhaps the deputy speaker position. The Ambassador said the BNP would look foolish were the election to be held without it and international observers declared the vote free, fair and credible.

AMBASSADOR RAISES SPORTS DIPLOMACY, IED AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

¶4. (C) The Ambassador asked Matin to approve a Sports Diplomacy initiative to support community policing. Noting the Superintendents of Police in Patuakhali and Chapai-Nowabganj wanted to participate in the program after school exams in late November, the Ambassador explained the only hold up was the lack of a letter from the Home Affairs Ministry approving the project. Matin said providing a letter should not be a problem.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador also asked Matin to approve the Embassy's counter-violence and IED awareness campaign, designed to support Matin's goal of providing a secure environment before and after the elections. The Ambassador said the messages to educate the public would be on television, radio, and in newspaper advertisements. Matin and Karim initially expressed reservations, saying an IED awareness program would be interpreted by Bangladeshis negatively and would create fear. Karim suggested using imams and madrassa teachers to disseminate IED awareness messages; communities trusted those religious leaders, who could allay public fears. Matin and Karim said they would support the

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program, however, if DGFI and the RAB voiced approval.

COMMENT: PUSHING FORWARD

¶6. (C) In follow up to the meeting, the Ambassador will write a letter to Matin thanking him for approving the Sports Diplomacy program. The letter also will be faxed to Superintendents of Police to show there are no more hurdles to their participation in the program. The Embassy also will seek support from the RAB and DGFI for the anti-violence and IED awareness campaign to win final Home Ministry approval. That campaign is particularly important to have in place before the December election campaign, and the Embassy will continue to urge the Ministry to act in all haste.

Moriarty